

Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard (CA-34) made the following remarks at La Casita's Treatment Program graduation ceremony in Downey:

“Congratulations graduates and thank you for the honor of being with you for this extraordinary accomplishment in your life.

Prior to being in elected office, I worked in alcohol and drug programs and saw firsthand how addiction controlled and impacted the lives of individuals and their families.

Even now I have close friends who are going through the same pain and challenges you have had to face.

So to be with you and your family today, knowing the incredible obstacles you've overcome, is truly awesome.

Against all odds, today you are role models for others fighting addiction and violence in their homes.

Through your example, you are giving them hope that it is possible to have a better life, no matter how difficult or scary the road may be away from their addiction and violence.

While we are here to celebrate your outstanding achievements, I know that along the way there were many who encouraged you, comforted you and helped you to believe in yourself and your ability to reach your goal.

Many of those individuals are in this courtyard today. They are the unsung heroes behind the success of each La Casita graduate.

I would like to begin by acknowledging Lynne Appel, the Executive Director of The Southern California Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program for her commitment to empowering women and families to lead safe, clean and sober lives of stability.

I also want to acknowledge the staff of La Casita for their unyielding commitment to you and all the women who come through their program. Often times, it was they who saw the potential in you to recover even before you saw it in yourself. And through their tireless vision, patience and determination you found your strength and completed this program.

But, most importantly I want to recognize and commend your family and friends who have helped you make today a reality.

From the time you entered La Casita's program to this moment of great celebration, it was their love, encouragement and belief in you, your value and your goodness that served as the engine that pulled you to victory.

If you look around you can easily identify them by their beaming faces of pride in what you have achieved to be clean and sober.

But ultimately today's graduation is about you, your courage, strength and determination to change despair into hope, obstacles into opportunities of growth and denigration into the energy to fight for the life and respect you so rightly deserve.

As you prepare for your future, I want to encourage you to make today the beginning not the end of your learning experiences because developing your skills and your talents is key to your continued success.

That is why I was so happy to learn that you have enrolled to earn your GED degree or to receive workforce skills training. I cannot begin to tell you how critical it is—especially for women—to have economic independence to provide for yourself and your children.

With a diploma and livelihood skills in hand, you will have the power economically to improve the quality of your life.

And if you ever find yourself in an abusive relationship, your education and training will keep you from ever having to be in the terrifying position of choosing between living with your abuser or leaving the violence without being able to provide for yourself and your children.

In other words, you will be in a strong position to preserve your personal liberty and ensure that nothing ever stands between you and the choices you can make for the safe, healthy, and fulfilling life each of you deserve.

And as always keep in mind, no one, for any reason has the right to mistreat you or your children either mentally or physically.

As you move into the next phases of your lives, you will encounter new challenges and opportunities, gain new strengths and make difficult sacrifices.

When you face those challenges in your life remember today and the extraordinary courage and strength within you that has put you on your pathway to building and reclaiming life.

While your graduation marks a life milestone of the accomplishments you have made, it also marks the beginning of the life ahead of you. As you look to this next chapter, it is common and even appropriate to feel a bit nervous because life itself is hard. No matter who you are or where you come from, there are always temptations and problems in life that threaten to bring you down.

But when new challenges confront you, as they inevitably will, look back over your shoulder to see yourselves today, remembering the strength it took to get here.

Then look further back at your many nights here at La Casita over the course of 180 days, 4,320 hours, 259,200 minutes. That is a lot of time during which you could have taken the option that seemed easier, but instead you fought for the one that was right.

You are an inspiration to me, to the staff of La Casita and to the community at large.

Most of all, you are an inspiration to your families and children. You have opened the door of possibility for them of what they might accomplish and overcome because of what you have done and continue to do as you advance on your path of recovery and success.

So go out. Build your life. Start today. And remember—from your Congresswoman, as well as from one woman to another—there is nothing you can't accomplish or overcome. Why? Because you have already done it. Congratulations. Thank you."

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